



For the attention of:
All Liberal MPs

May 27, 2010

I am writing to you today to encourage you to take a strong stand for human rights and justice in Canada and Colombia. The Standing Committee on International Trade will meet this afternoon and will vote on motions proposed by Conservative MP Gerald Keddy to shut down the Committee process and hear no more testimony on the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. I believe that this is the wrong step for the CIIT to be taking and urge you to ensure that Liberal MPs on the Committee vote against these motions.

The human rights atrocities committed in Colombia are well known throughout the world. Recent UN and Amnesty International reports show escalating violence against Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, including murder and forcible displacement from communal lands. The National Labour School (ENS) of Colombia accounted for the murders of 45 trade unionists in 2009. These accounts, and unacceptably high impunity rates, have been enough to stall and even stop similar free trade agreements in allied countries, including the United States.

The Liberals had originally and rightly opposed a quick passage of the Colombia free trade agreement on human rights grounds. Liberals asked that an independent human rights impact assessment be carried out before hand. In 2008, the Committee called on the government to undertake a human rights impact assessment. No such study has happened despite the fact that an overwhelming number of witnesses have supported it as a first step in the process.

When your party voted in the House of Commons last month to end second reading debate on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement and send Bill C-2 directly to trade committee, it was on the explicit condition that the committee carry out a "comprehensive" and "in depth" study of the agreement's human rights implications. The Liberals promised to be vigilant during the study of this agreement as witnesses speak to the trade committee on what they see as the deal's pros and cons.

Yesterday the Council of Canadians issued a media release in which we stated, "It's an inconvenient truth about this deal that it will likely make a bad situation worse in Colombia and do little for the Canadian economy. Voting for Keddy's motions on Thursday would be a transparent attempt to sweep that truth under the rug." Over the past year alone, your offices have received thousands of emails calling for a human rights impact assessment and, more recently, objecting to Conservative attempts to shut down debate.

Supporting the Keddy motions today would shut out important voices on the proposed Colombia free trade agreement, downgrade Canada's standing in the world as a human rights leader, and erode the credibility of the Liberal Party of Canada. I strongly encourage each of you to contact MP Scott Brison, MP Mario Silva and MP John Cannis to tell them to vote no on the Conservative motions today at trade committee.

Thank you.

Maude Barlow
National Chairperson, Council of Canadians